

*The Mothers of China*



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# THE MOTHERS OF CHINA

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President China W. C. T. U.

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"The World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union Stands with Hands Eagerly Outstretched to Make Happier and Better the Homes of This and Every Nation."

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In China woman as woman, in both the speech and the literature of the people has generally been slightly referred to, but as a mother, she is always honored, especially if the mother of a son. One is mortifyingly amused that the attributes, envy, jealousy, vanity, covetousness, should all have the female radical as their root. Are these not characteristic of whoever leads a narrow, restricted life, whether man or woman? The Chinese have never thought of a "white life for two," and they make woman the symbol for evil in many of their most unsavory characters. There are, however, a few beautiful characters in which the female radical is found, one of which is "peace" and the other "good." In peace we have the roof of a house and under it a woman, showing that woman in a home brings peace. The other character is a boy and girl together, and that makes "good," for nothing could be better than to have both a girl and a boy.

There are many instances where fathers have educated their daughters along with their sons, especially when they had no son, but this is seen only in wealthy families, and even then it is not common. There is a saying, "*Yo tsai wu duh*," applied only to girls. The meaning is: If a girl has talent, she is without virtue. The suppression of woman has largely had its foundation in a desire to protect her virtue. China has a number of novels of high literary excellence, but written at a time when, as in other countries, literature was not free from impure suggestion. Fathers were unwilling to have their daughters subjected to this corrupting influence, and so objected to their learning to read.

Every girl's life is expected to be governed by a rule of three—"The Three Obediences." First, she must obey her father; second, her husband; third, if her husband is dead, her son. The Confucian classics, and the classics for women and girls, abound in instances of filial piety, shown not only to the father, but also to the mother, so that after all, a mother has in many instances complete control over the actions of her son, even if he is of middle age, or past it.

A woman proves her right to honor and regard when she becomes a mother. One of the seven causes for divorce, according to the Confucian ethics, is failure to give birth to a son. The underlying reason for this is due to the custom of Confucian ancestral worship, which (going back long before Confu-

cianism) has a death-like grip upon the nation, for it is due to a longing to be remembered, a longing for immortality; hence a willingness to remember by sacrifice and homage those gone before. The failure in any generation to provide an heir to carry on this worship of the ancestors is akin to crime. Few cries I have ever heard sounded more bitter to me, than the cry of men well along in years, "*Chieh hu la,*" "*Chieh hu la.*" (Ended the family line, ended the family line!) Having no son, they felt the reproach of all the ages, the curse of all their ancestors. When a girl is born, she is spoken of as a "small joy," but when a boy is born he is "a great joy." And who can wonder, when such tremendous issues are at stake!

This same belief in ancestral worship has been the excuse for polygamy. If no son is born to the first wife, rather than to make her an outcast, a concubine is taken in hopes that she may bear a son. If she does so, as the first wife usually in all well-to-do families is of rank equal to the husband, the child is transferred to the first wife and to her is given the name of mother with the right of control, if she is equal to maintaining it. Frequently, if the first wife dies, the real mother is given the rank of wife. A noted example of this is the case of the late Grand Dowager, who was made an Empress equal in authority with the first Empress, after the birth of her son, Tung Chih. I have been told, however, that no secondary wife was received at court, unless, through the clem-

ency of the throne and by special edict, she had been raised to the rank of a first wife after her predecessor's death.

The shut-in lives, without occupation for either hands or brain, of Chinese ladies of high rank, save in cities like Shanghai, and of late in Peking, have made many women delicate and unfitted for motherhood, and the mothers of too many of the sons of men of rare gifts and ability have been women of inferior gifts, without mental or spiritual capacity. It is not in such homes, save at the time of funerals, one finds a high type of filial piety.

I have known a son of over forty who merited his mother's reproof and who at her command brought bamboo switches and kneeling down before her, received her castigations. No friend would ridicule such an act, but regard the man as still possessed of a conscience and of filial regard. I have often seen sons bearing their mothers on their backs in times of famine or flood. The story is told of a daughter, who unable to provide her mother meat, cut a piece of flesh from her own arm and, broiling it, presented it to her parent. A son, too, finding his aged mother in need of fish, removed his clothing so as the better to thaw the ice by means of the warmth of his own body, and then waited until he could catch a fish.

Sometimes it seems as if men not allowed by custom to use endearing phrases to their wives, pour out their affection upon their mothers. At our hospitals how often when patients are in

distress do we hear them call: "My mother! Oh, my mother." Again and again I have been thrilled while listening to men telling of their mothers, or if absent from them, of the days and nights of longing. In the book entitled, "China under the Dowager Empress," in the diary by Ching Shan one can obtain an idea of this feeling toward a mother felt by many Chinese. The absolute lack of filial piety on the part of his sons, which is revealed in the diary, is also far too common.

To many tender-hearted, unselfish mothers, who with the knowledge that is theirs, have tried wisely to train their children, the limitations of education, the omnipresent superstitions, the lack of any knowledge of hygiene have all been terrible handicaps. Married usually at an early age and sometimes, if her own parents were poor, taken to the home of her betrothed, while still a little girl, so as to be the servant of the mother-in-law; perchance, if she were older, to carry around on her own back her future husband, she has been ill-fitted for life's duties and responsibilities, especially to have the care of a child. The mother-in-law has not a savory reputation, but while there are mothers-in-law who have ill treated the brides of the family, have been selfish and even cruel, many have been very patient, long-suffering and unselfish. A woman without education, however, is rarely fitted for power over the lives of others, and Chinese mothers-in-law are no exception to this rule.

## Gifted Mothers of Great Men

China's great men have had gifted mothers. The mother of Wen Wang, one of China's earliest and most remarkable kings, it is said before his birth followed all the rules now known in western lands to govern the prenatal life. She was careful concerning her food, her exercise, and guarded herself for her son's sake from all ravishing music, from seeing or hearing anything which would mar her son physically, mentally or morally. Confucius' mother, too, was a remarkable woman, while every one in China knows how the mother of Mencius, the philosopher whose writings rank next to the great sage's, moved three times for the sake of her son. Living beside a theater, the son day after day played acting. Seeing this the mother moved, and this time the house was near a cemetery. What was the parent's consternation to see the boy playing funeral. She moved again. Near by was a butcher's shop and little Mencius soon gave his time to playing slaughtering. Coming in one day while his mother was weaving cloth, he stood beside her. She picked up her shears and one by one cut the threads. Mencius remonstrated, saying she was spoiling all her work. "Yes," she replied, "but you are spoiling your life, not applying yourself to anything." Mencius learned his lesson. The mother moved a third time, the home being close to a school-house. Then Mencius applied himself to books.



So highly has motherhood been regarded and so desirous have the Chinese been to protect their women from insult, and also from temptation, that they have instituted many customs which seem to us unreasonable and absurd, but which are in reality but the outgrowth of an effort to preserve morality among their women, as, for instance, the high walls, great gates, and bound feet. More than one brilliant woman has wrecked a kingdom and the power of a fascinating woman without virtue to lead captive the strongest man finds expression in literature, in theatrical plays, and in the proverbs of the people.

### Moral Renaissance of Women

Since 1900 we have been having the dawn of a new day, when for the first time in history, the moral forces of Chinese women in a united effort are finding expression in the betterment of their own sex, and in the effort to free their country from some of the evils which menace it. This has been shown in the starting of the girls' schools; in the anti-cigaretet and anti-opium movements. So ardent to bring about the revolution and insure its success have some of the women become, that in Nanking and Shanghai they have organized into companies of amazons and are ready to fight.

In every land the over emphasis of that which is good renders it an evil. Filial piety, over emphasized, has done more than any other thing to delay progress in China. It has been unfilial for one

generation to change the customs of the past. It has been unfilial for a son to carry out any project disapproved by his parents. It has given to fathers and mothers with a narrow perspective, and with the idea that the interests of the parents should always be primary, the right to thwart every project for the advancement of their children, which they did not approve. No wonder the Chinese have opposed Christianity with its principles of the sacredness of personality, the duty to live up to one's best and the obligation of obedience to parents, but *only in the Lord*.

It is the mothers who have kept the wives and children in China during these scores of years when Chinese have come to America, lest the sons should not return to worship or send the earnings back. It is Young China that has brought about the present revolution. Young China wishes to choose his own wife, no longer making the principal consideration the approval of the mother in securing a daughter-in-law to wait upon herself. Young China even aspires to an independent home and children trained and disciplined without the interference of the elders. Old China shakes the head. Only ruin seems in sight. Must the bride henceforth have the best clothes, the honored seat, the first consideration! Never was there such a crisis in any nation, never such an opportunity to help 150,000,000 girls and women in this new readjustment.

## A Call for Help

As the restraints of the past, the careful guarding by mother and mother-in-law are resisted and disregarded, terrible perils are imminent——perils which threaten the purity of China's mothers. We must help them to see how much China, in continuing to emphasize the courteous honorable treatment due to all elders and the privilege as well as duty of sons and daughters in caring for their parents during their declining years, has to give to other nations.

The World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union eagerly stands with hands outstretched to make happier and better the homes of this and every nation. It wages a perpetual fight against the enemies which threaten health, purity and sanctity. China is now, after these many years, accepting your handclasp, believing that you will help her to preserve what is noblest in her past and "press forward to those heights of blessedness where there is no more curse."

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